Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

'Is it okay to eat a dog in Korea . . . like China?' Assumptions of national food-eating practices in intercultural interaction

Adam Brandt[a]* and Christopher Jenks[b]

[a]*School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, King George VI Building, Queen Victoria Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8ST, UK;* [b]*English Department, City University of Hong Kong, Tat Chee Road, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong*

There is a small body of research which shows how intercultural communication is constituted in and through talk-in-interaction, and can be made relevant or irrelevant by interactants on a moment-by-moment basis. Our paper builds on this literature by investigating how cultural assumptions of national food-eating practices are deployed, contested and co-constructed in an online, voice-based chat room. Using conversation analysis, findings show how assumptions about cultural practices sequentially unfold in a setting where the interactants are strangers. Additionally, we show how assumptions about cultural practices can be used for rhetorical purposes, and can be treated as simple and complex in a single exchange.

지금까지 다뤄진 다문화 의사소통(intercultural communication)에 관한 연구들을 살펴보면, 상호간의 대화(talk-in-interaction) 안에서 또는 그 대화를 통해서 (e.g. Nishizaka, 1995) 순간순간 대화에 참여한 사람들에 의해 어떻게 적절한 또는 부적절한 의사소통이 이뤄지는 지에 대한 것들을 밝히는 연구들이 있다 (e.g. Mori, 2003). 본 연구는, 이 연구들을 근거로 하여, 음성 기반의 온라인 대화방에서 한 나라의 음식 습관 (national-food eating practices)에 대한 문화적인 가정들이 어떻게 전개되고, 논쟁의 배경이 되며, 더 나아가 대화 내에서 어떻게 재구성되어지는 가를 조사. 본 연구는 대화분석(conversation analysis)을 통하여 온라인 대화방 데이타 안에서 문화적 관습에 대한 가정들이 서로 낯선 대화자들 사이에서 어떻게 순차적으로 나타나는 가를 밝혀 줄뿐더러, 문화적 관습에 대한 가정들이 설득력을 갖기 위해 어떻게 이용될 수 있으며, 한 번 이뤄지는 대화 속에서 단순하면서도 복잡하게 다루어 질 수 있는 지를 설명한다。

Keywords: interculturality; conversation analysis; social interaction; cultural practices; cultural assumptions; membership categorisation analysis

Introduction

There is a small but growing body of literature which has argued against the implied notion that cultural differences are omnirelevant features of intercultural communication (cf. Bjorge, 2007; Carbaugh, 2007; Chiang, 2009; Neuliep, 2006). Researchers working within this conceptualisation have shown that interculturality should not be taken for granted, but rather investigated as a phenomenon that is achieved

*Corresponding author. Email: adam.brandt@newcastle.ac.uk

discursively (e.g. Mori, 2003; Nishizaka, 1995, 1999). That is, the interculturality of communication should not be deemed relevant until the interactants themselves have made relevant, through talk and/or interaction, their cultural similarities and differences. Despite growing interest in this area of research, there are still many unanswered questions pertaining to how interactants make culture relevant in interaction. For example, how are cultural assumptions deployed, refuted and contested in interaction? How do members of a cultural group talk about particular cultural practices within that group? What interactional resources are used to accomplish these various social endeavours? In addition to the need to explore these issues, the settings and makeup of interactants investigated in previous studies must be expanded to include the many emerging contexts that play an important role in the world we live in (e.g. Internet chat rooms and social networking sites). It could be said, therefore, that there is still much to be gained in investigating culture and cultural identities as they are constituted in and through talk-in-interaction.

In this paper, we address some of the questions above and expand upon existing understandings of intercultural communication by adopting an ethnomethodologically informed microanalysis of a discussion of national food-eating practices. Firstly, we examine interculturality in the under-explored communicative setting of multi-participant voice-based online chat rooms. Secondly, we show that it is not only cultural identities that can be used as social-interactional resources, but also specific identity-bound practices and artefacts. Thirdly, we investigate how cultural assumptions are deployed, refuted and co-constructed in casual first encounters (cf. Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984). Fourthly, we demonstrate how cultural assumptions and national cultural memberships are used to achieve certain interactional and rhetorical goals. Finally, we show that, and how, an assumption about one national cultural practice can be used to contest an assumption about another.

Interculturality: national cultural differences and identities in interaction

The previous research of relevance to this study has taken the position that the 'intercultural' nature of an interaction cannot be predefined, but is constituted in and through the interaction itself, and in how those involved demonstrably orient to it. This approach is in fitting more generally with the principles of ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967), and its associated methodologies of conversation analysis (CA; e.g. Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA; e.g. Hester & Eglin, 1997; Sacks, 1992), which have long established that identities and cultures are not static, omnirelevant aspects of the social world, but are rather co-constructed and negotiable through talk-in-interaction.[1] In short, this approach understands that:

> Social interaction is the primordial means through which the business of the social world is transacted, the identities of the participants are affirmed or denied, and its cultures are transmitted, renewed, and modified. (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 283)

Nishizaka (1995, 1999) appears to have been the first to apply an ethnomethodological interpretation to the study of intercultural communication. For Nishizaka:

> . . .what makes the interaction relevantly intercultural is neither those features outside the interaction that are observed by the observer in reference to attributes selected by him or

her, nor what each participant thinks about themselves behind the interaction (i.e., inside their heads); rather, it is a form of exchange in the interaction itself. (1995, p. 307)

What Nishizaka is arguing is that the analyst must take an ethnomethodologically emic perspective, one that examines the interactants' methods for co-constructing, and displaying, understanding within the sequential organisation in which talk occurs. An ethnomethodologically emic perspective is different than the more generic use of 'emic' in the social sciences in that the former perspective does not use post-hoc interviews as a methodological tool, but only considers displayed orientations of the participants at the time of the interaction being analysed. For Nishizaka then, the interest in the study of intercultural communication lies in explicating exactly how interactants do 'being a Japanese (or a foreigner)', for example, or how they do 'cultural differences'; in other words, how is the interculturality of an interaction achieved in and through talk?

By examining radio show interviews between Japanese hosts and foreign students, Nishizaka (1995, 1999) demonstrated how the interactants' national identities and cultural differences were interactively constituted. Drawing upon Sacks' (1992) work on identity categorisation, Nishizaka argued that the making relevant of Japanese identity does not invoke the other interactant's national identity, but instead his identity as *non*-Japanese, or as a foreigner. Further, with these identities (or in MCA terms, collections, or membership categorisation devices) come normative expectations about an imbalance of linguistic and national cultural knowledge, and entitlements to make evaluations on such knowledge.

Building on Nishizaka's observations, Fukuda (2006) explored how a 'foreigner' identity can be discursively constructed. In her analysis of a dinner table conversation, Fukuda showed how a Chinese student is ascribed the identity of 'Japanese cultural novice' by her Japanese hosts. For example, in constantly asking the Chinese student if she 'is okay' when drinking maccha (a Japanese green tea), her hosts treated the cultural practice of drinking maccha as alien to her. That is, the practice of drinking maccha is constructed as 'belonging' to the Japanese interactants and not to their foreign guest.

Mori (2003) demonstrated how such normative expectations about cultural knowledge are used as resources in the organisation of social interaction. In her data, American and Japanese college students are getting acquainted at a university conversation table. In this situation, the two groups of national students sought common ground by asking questions about their experiences of each other's countries.

Mori's data provides examples of how expectations of cultural knowledge shape turn design and allocation. For example, when one interactant asks, 'is there an experience of seeing Japanese movies?',[2] it can be assumed that the question is directed at a non-Japanese interlocutor. Mori argued that the '...ways in which the participants nominate a particular set of topics, and the ways in which they organise their participation thereafter' (Mori, 2003, p. 172) are examples of how interculturality can be made relevant in interaction. However, the relevance of different cultural identities is not always the case in interaction; Mori also discusses occasions in her data in which interculturality could potentially be made relevant, but is not.

The research discussed here has shown how normative expectations about knowledge and non-knowledge of cultural practices and artefacts are socially organised and socially organising. For example, Fukuda (2006) suggests that the 'Otherisation' which occurs in her data is, in part, manifest in the assumptions made

about aspects of Chinese national culture, such as low salaries, lack of industry and the lack of freedom to travel. She argues that such stereotyping and exoticising demonstrate how ideological positions can, intentionally or otherwise, be portrayed through social discourse, and that this can be interpreted as the exertion of power. In her data, such assumptions are invariably refuted outright by the Chinese student. Similarly in our data, there are demonstrable instances of the deployment, and refutation, of assumptions regarding national cultural practices. However, such cultural assumptions appear to be deployed and refuted in different ways, and perhaps for different social purposes than the assertion of power (e.g. to get acquainted and engage in playful banter).

The data and analyses to be presented in this paper add to the literature, but differ in a number of ways; while previous studies have all contributed to an understanding of how culture and identity are co-constructed in talk-in-interaction, the settings investigated have invariably been ones in which issues and distinctions such as 'home'/'visitor' and 'national'/'foreigner' are substantive to the interactants and indeed to the interaction. One could perhaps argue that the participatory makeup of these studies led to particular types of interactional practices, such as 'Otherisation' (though this is an empirical issue that must be examined further). This is not a criticism, as these settings and interactional practices are realities many face, but rather an observation of what has been investigated in the literature. In contrast, the data that we will present below examines a multi-participant, multinational, online setting where the interactants' nationalities and national cultural member-ships are not known until they have been requested and/or revealed within the talk. One of our present aims is to show that, once an interactant's national cultural membership is made public, it can create opportunities for other interactants to ask questions and display assumptions about practices related to that national culture. One form of assumption can be the comparison with a similar practice from another national culture. These assumptions and comparisons are subsequently open to refutation, negotiation and/or alignment, as we will demonstrate.

Research context

The data examined in this paper are taken from a corpus of over 40 hours of online voice-based computer-mediated communication. Each recording varied in length, lasting anywhere from five minutes to an hour or more. The CA transcription conventions used to transcribe our recordings can be found in Appendix 1. One of the main objectives in transcribing data using CA transcription conventions is that data recordings must be represented in transcript form as they are heard and/or seen, with very little to no modification of what has been said and/or done. Permission to record was given by all interactants. Data were recorded in Skypecasts, a new but, for technical reasons, currently unavailable online voice-based chat room that hosts multi-party communication. The number of participants in each chat room varied as well, with most recordings comprising three or more interactants. Skypecasts work in very much the same way as text-based chat rooms in that interactants can freely enter and leave 'rooms'. However, the primary mode of communication in Skypecasts is the spoken language. Skypecast interactants can also send each other private text messages, but video communication is not possible. As any adult with an Internet connection can create (i.e. host) and participate in a Skypecast, it is not uncommon in our data set to have interactants from several different countries and of diverse

cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most of the interactants in our study do not appear to speak English as their first language, though most interactants speak fluently and accurately enough to engage in lengthy conversations. Our recordings consist largely of chat rooms that were created for the ostensible purpose of practising and learning English. Such rooms often possess language-learning themes, such as 'Practice Your English' or 'Learn English', though there are few instances of explicit talk concerning language teaching and learning.

Despite the title of these chat rooms, the interactants do not appear to orient to language-learning identities (e.g. students of English), nor do they talk about the culture and practices of being in a language classroom. Rather, the interactants appear to be focused on activities such as getting acquainted, sharing travel experiences, telling stories and jokes, and ridiculing and insulting each other. In other words, there are no predetermined topics or interactional agendas, apart from chatting and using English. Because there are few explicit orientations to doing language learning or being language learners, it is safe to say that the titles of the chat rooms had little influence on the verbal behaviour of the interactants. However, because most of the interactants in our data set have met for the first time, talk is largely concerned with getting acquainted (Jenks, 2009). This type of talk lends itself to discussions of cultural similarities and differences, including perceptions of national cultures. Furthermore, the context of communicating in chat rooms – where interactants cannot see each other and screen names are typically used in lieu of 'real' names – may encourage interactants to push the communicative norms of what is typically accepted in face-to-face interaction (e.g. revealing cultural biases and ridiculing cultural practices). However, this is an empirical issue that cannot be addressed with the methodology adopted in this paper.

Data analysis

In this section, we provide a micro-analysis of three excerpts taken from the context discussed above. The excerpts are all taken from an interaction in which Sky, James, June, Jin and other Skypecast users are getting acquainted in a chat room entitled 'Welcome English Beginner...'. In the seconds leading up to the first excerpt, Sky has established that a number of his interlocutors are from South Korea.

(1) 'leg of chair'

[12:50-13:55]

```
1     Sky:       >I wanna ↑a:sk ↓something
2                (0.2) .hh (0.7) ↑is it-
3                is it ↑okay to eat (.) a
4                dog in k- korea? (0.2) like
5                ↓china
6                (1.3)
7     Sky:       you [guys]=
8     June:          [↑who]
```

```
9     Sky:      =eat [dog ]=
10    James:         [yeah]
11    Sky:      =↓too
12              (0.9)
13    Sky:      °yeah°=
14    Dukes:    =do you know ↑korean=
15    June:     =↑yes of course
16              (1.1)
17    Sky:      .hh (.) what about- what about
18              eating, .hh what about ↑eating
19              uh scorpion?
20              (0.6)
21    Sky:      do you eat scorpions?
22              (0.9)
23    James:    ↓no:: =
24    June:     =yeah. (0.2) in china ↓people:
25              usually, (1.0) they e- eat (0.8)
26              ↑whole ↓thi:ng (0.4) except
27              (0.4) the:: (0.2) l:eg of ↓chair
28              (0.9)
29    June:     do you ↑know hahehhy(hh)eahh
30              (0.7)
31    Sky:      ↑CHA::IR except $the chai(hh)r?$
32              (0.7)
33    June:     .hhh (.) they eat the leg (0.2)
34              $l:eg$ of (.) ↓chair$ l:eg of
35              ↓chair it's kind of (0.4)
36              u::h=uh=uh (0.4) kind of story
37              (0.8) so they (.) they eat
38              everything (0.8) cos they
39              [make]=
40    Sky:      [ uh ]
41    June:     =uh (.) ↓food
42              (0.7)
43    June:     yes
44              (0.9)
45    June:     but:: in ↑korea (1.1) in korea,
46              (0.4) distinction is preferred
47              (.) from china::
48              (2.8)
49    Sky:      s::o you're a little bit (***)
50              than (.) ↑chinese (.) ↑right (.)
51              .hh (0.7) koreans are picky?
52              (0.2) ((sniffs)) (0.2) in ↑food
```

The excerpt begins with Sky's announcement that a question is to follow ('I wanna ask something', line 1). Though this announcement does not address a particular recipient, the question that Sky asks attends to his Korean co-interactants ('is it okay to eat a dog in Korea?', lines 3–4). The question itself does three things: (1) it positions Sky as an interactant seeking clarification of Korean national culture, (2) it orients to those Sky is addressing as interactants knowledgeable of Korean national culture and (3) in saying 'is it *okay* to eat' (as opposed to, for example, 'do people eat'), Sky is acknowledging, or making relevant, the fact that this practice is not only uncommon in many places, but is also considered morally questionable. In lines 4–5, the post-question expansion 'like China' demonstrates that Sky assumes that dog-eating occurs in China. In so doing, Sky broaches the topic of eating dogs in an arguably less confrontational way by referring to China as a country that possibly shares the same food-eating practices.[3]

Sky's co-interactants do not answer his question in the subsequent 1.3 seconds (line 6), which leads to a second, follow-up question. This second question is reformulated from one with moral implications to one of actual practice (from 'is it okay' to 'you guys eat dog too'). In line 13, Sky appears to treat James' 'yeah' (line 10) as a response to his question as Sky does not repeat or reformulate his question again. This initial question and answer sequence is similar to those observed in Mori's (2003) research, where she argues that the intercultural nature of interactions is made relevant by (1) topic selection, (2) next-speaker selection and (3) the use of stance markers.

In lines 17–19, Sky continues his questioning. In this instance, Sky begins to formulate his question, restarts, and then completes his question ('what about what about . . . what about eating uh scorpion?'). The three-part repetition of 'what about' is characteristic of someone thinking through verbalisation, and may indicate the whimsical or capricious nature of the question (Tannen, 1987). This is further demonstrated in the discourse filler 'uh', which immediately precedes the food in question (Schiffrin, 1988). Here, Sky asks if Koreans eat scorpions and later, in line 21, reformulates his question ('do you eat scorpions?'). By asking if Koreans eat scorpions, Sky maintains his position as an interactant questioning Korean national culture, though this time he uses a venomous animal as an example of 'unusual' food-eating practices. Although in some cultures eating dogs and scorpions may be equally normative practices, by moving from domesticated to dangerous animals, Sky upgrades his supposition that Koreans eat 'unusual' things. This is similar to the phenomena observed by Fukuda (2006), in which cultural 'Others', and their cultural practices, are exoticised, exaggerated and stereotyped.

In line 23, James responds to Sky's reformulated question with a 'no', which is then immediately followed by June's 'yeah'. Because this 'yeah' is uttered matter-of-factly, with closing intonation, it does not appear to be an affirmative answer to Sky's question, but is either an agreement token to James's 'no', which he intends to expand upon, or it is simply a marker that June intends to take an extended turn (Schegloff, 1982; Schiffrin, 1988). In lines 24–27, June orients to Sky's earlier comparison of Korea to China by explaining that 'in China people usually eat everything except the leg of chair'.[4] This statement is not responded to, and so June appears to do an understanding check, coupled with laughter (line 29). In line 31, Sky requests confirmation of the word 'chair', which June responds to by clarifying that the Chinese eat everything 'except $the chair?$'. The smile voice produced by

Sky and June demonstrates that both interactants are orienting to the exchange as non-serious (see Roberts & Robinson, 2004, p. 383). In lines 37–41, June then explains that the story refers to the assumption that Chinese people eat many things.

June's 'leg of chair' story serves to juxtapose Korean food-eating practices with those of China, as he later explicitly makes the distinction between the two countries ('but in Korea, distinction is preferred from China', lines 45–47). In other words, June is saying that in China, people will eat anything, but this is not the case in Korea. Sky acknowledges this point in lines 49–52, by orienting to the comparison between China and Korea, and concluding with 'Koreans are picky in food'. Although this may not have quite been the point June was making, in aligning himself with June's cultural assumption, Sky does appear to be demonstrating that he understands June's attempt to distance Koreans from the cultural practices of China.

As our observations show, the interactional work which June undertakes in order to distance Korea from the practice of eating scorpions and, more importantly, from the comparison with Chinese food-eating practices, serves as an example of the efforts which can be undertaken to nullify national cultural assumptions made by non-natives/non-experts of a given national culture. Following Mori's (2003) observations, we can see that Sky makes relevant the interculturality of this interaction by (1) making relevant an asymmetry of knowledge about Korean cultural practices, and, by extension, (2) nominating his co-interactants as being in a position to provide information about Korean culture. Further, James and June align with the identities they are ascribed by offering answers and explanations.

However, this example differs from Mori's research; rather than asking questions about interlocutors' experiences of another culture (cf. Mori, 2003), in this example, Sky seeks clarification of assumptions he has of national food-eating practices in Korea. In doing this, he also invokes an assumption about a practice within another national culture, namely China. Sky uses the (claimed) Chinese practice of eating dog as an interactional resource to justify his (potentially) contentious and offensive question. Rather than address the assumption that Koreans eat dogs, June decides to address the assumption that China and Korea may share similar food-eating practices. In his rejection of the assumption that China and Korea share similar food-eating practices, June also adopts an assumption regarding Chinese food-eating practices, and uses it for rhetorical purposes – making a joke at the expense of that culture in order to emphasise the difference between China and Korea.

This is not to say that the 'cultural practices of China' are absolute, and that people in China *do* eat anything. In fact, the extent to which that is true is irrelevant to our understanding of what is going on in the interaction; the interactants in this exchange are, at that moment, treating the practice as real, while at the same time negotiating the truth about Korean food-eating practices.

Having been told that Koreans do not eat scorpions, Sky continues his line of questioning about Korean food-eating practices.

(2) 'monkey brain'

[13:56-14:36]

```
1    Sky:      I mean you:- you choose more
2              dunt cha- .hhh do you eat monkey
3              ↑brain ↓there
4              (0.5)
5    Jin:      ^↑oh: =hh^
6              (0.3)
7    Sky:      hhh=huhhuhuhuhuhu
8              (0.2)
9    Sky?:     .hhh=
10   ?:        =°mon(hh)key [br(hh)a-°]
11   June:                 [  no::  ]=
12   Sky:      =↑really=
13   James:    =do you know,
14             (1.0)
15   James:    yeah=
16   Sky:      =mmhm=
17   James:    =so I think there's a (0.3) m-
18             monkey brain's very expensive in
19             korea so we didn't have a (0.3)
20             nough time to:: have a good .hhh
21             (.) good (.) monkey brains so you
22             ↑know [yeah it's- it's]=
23   Sky?:           [  hehehehe    ]
24   James:    =[it's a very ]=
25   June:      [  hehehe    ]
26   James:    =↑rar↓er (0.3) so $when we::,
27             when-$ if we visit da (0.3) ↑zoo
28             (0.2) is impossible (for them)
29             that they are usually: in the
30             (0.2) in:: some kind of cage so
31             (.) .hh (.) we can find ther- uh
32             monkey- >so you know< .hh your
33             question is (saying) (0.3) when
34             you read some kinda article from
35             the internet so:: (0.6) that many
36             [south]=
37   Sky:      [ su- ]
38   James:    =korean people use e- (.) had a:
39             (0.2) ↑d[og]=
40   Sky:              [uh]
41   James:    =oh ↑yeah
```

After having been told that eating scorpions is not a typical Korean practice, Sky continues his line of questioning about 'unusual' Korean food-eating practices. He begins by apparently formulating another assumption ('I mean you...you choose more dunt cha . . .', lines 1–2), before immediately following up with the question, 'do you eat monkey brain there?' (lines 2–3). Much like in Fukuda's data (Mori, 2003, pp. 435–437), the use of the tag question 'dunt cha?' is designed to project agreement, displaying the strength of the questioner's supposition. Additionally, in adding 'there' to the end of his question, Sky positions his question as referring to Korea in general, as opposed to just his interlocutors.

Jin reacts to the question with a trilled sound that appears to demonstrate that she is acknowledging the outrageousness of the question. Sky follows Jin's turn with laughter, possibly as an acknowledgement that his question is outrageous and/or humorous to him. An unidentified interactant aligns with this by quietly uttering 'monkey brain', which is embedded with laughter (line 10). This is cut off by June's affirmative 'no' (line 11), and then Sky responds with an exclamation 'really?' (line 12).

In line 13, James begins with what would presumably be his response to Sky's questions ('do you know'), with continuing intonation, suggesting more is to follow. James then goes on to explain that monkey brain is very expensive in Korea, and so not many Koreans get a chance to sample it ('monkey brain's very expensive in Korea, so we didn't have enough time to have a good monkey brain', lines 18–21). Here, James is clearly orienting to his identity as a member of Korean culture ('we'), and is doing so in a presumably sarcastic and/or humorous way as one would not normally be able to get or buy monkey brains from a zoo. Further, James uses his membership as a resource to address the cultural assumption that Koreans eat monkey brains by formulating a jocular story.

Sky and June align to the sarcastic or humorous nature of James' response with laughter tokens (lines 23 and 25, respectively), and James continues by stating that 'when we visit the zoo, is impossible (to get them), because they are in some kind of cage' (lines 25–29). This is uttered, in part, with a smile voice, further demonstrating that James is treating the issue of eating monkey brains as comical (lines 25–26). James continues until lines 29–31, at which point during mid-utterance, he switches topics and readdresses Sky's initial question about eating dogs.

This negotiation of an assumption about Korean cultural practices has some similarities with the previous example, in that James uses humour to refute a question/claim made by Sky. But there are differences in the resources deployed to respond to the question. In the previous example, June uses his own assumption about Chinese food-eating practices as a means to make his point. But in this example, James uses his own identity as a Korean to treat Sky's assumption as somewhat absurd. By mockingly saying that 'we' (Koreans) would eat monkey brain if it wasn't so expensive and difficult to obtain, James is treating the question as non-serious. It is only possible for James to speak on behalf of Koreans and Korean culture in this way by drawing upon his identity as a member of that national culture. Much like the previous research reported in the beginning of this paper, we see normative expectations of the relationship between cultural membership and cultural knowledge at play here. More specifically, the interactional organisation of this sequence reveals how cultural assumptions can be constructed and subsequently refuted.

As has been briefly addressed in the excerpts above, the interactants appear to use essentialised accounts of cultures and some cultural practices as interactional

resources. In the next excerpt, we will demonstrate how cultural practices are not always treated as simple and fixed, but can be discussed as complex phenomena that vary from individual to individual.

After switching topics, James continues to share his knowledge of dog-eating practices.

(3) 'bear soup'

[14:39-16:07]

```
1     James:    I love a dogs bu:t, (.) I don't
2               (0.2) i- i- I don't actually hate
3               uh: (0.2)   have a (0.2) dog u- e-
4               the meaning is uh (0.3) but my
5               father and my elder brother like
6               (kill) dogs because in: hot
7               ↑summer (0.4) they are very weak
8               so you know, (0.3) in korean
9               history (0.3) the::y a- (0.4) a
10              long long ago (.) [ they: (a-)  ]
11    Sky:                        [.hhh ↑OKA::Y ]
12              I- I- I love dogs too I love dogs
13              too=they're so cute but doesn't
14              mean I have to eat ↓them
15              (0.8)
16    Sky:      right?
17              (0.5)
18    James:    u:h (0.2) [yeah]=
19    June:               [ye:s]
20    James:    =in your case ↓yeah
21              (0.5)
22    James:    yeah bu::t [>in my case<]=
23    Sky:                 [ yeah a- hu-]
24    James:    =I don't like to: have a:::
25              (0.4) the: (0.3) have a dog
26              because you know (0.2) I love
27              a dogs? so in (.) my case I have
28              one (0.3) one (0.2) once
29              experience in my=er (.) in my
30              life is very:, (0.3) when I was
31              six years ol:d? (0.4) and my
32              grandpa- my grandfather grandma
33              said that (.) .hh hey james
```

```
34                      (0.4) that (.) is ↑not (0.4) dog
35                      soup it's only (0.3) bear soup
36                      >at the time< (0.2) I was very
37                      ↑young
                        ((14 lines omitted))
51      James:          I think=ed wow it's a good chance
52                      to have uh .hh (0.4) bear soup
53                      but as time goes by I knew (0.3)
54                      that is my:: (0.5) dog (0.4)
55                      soup so: after that I hate to
56                      have a (0.4) dog (0.6) ↑so:up
57                      yeah (.) so: >in my case<
```

James begins his extended turn by stating that he loves dogs (line 1). He continues by saying that he doesn't like to have (i.e. eat) dog (throughout the exchange, James refers to eating dog as 'having dog'). James then counters his position with that of his father and elder brother, who 'like kill dogs' (lines 4–5). James seems to suggest that their willingness to kill dogs is justifiable, because in the hot Korean summer, his brother and father become very weak, thus implying that they need the sustenance which comes from eating dog.[5] At this point, James distances himself further from the practice of killing and eating dogs, by emphasising 'Korean history' (line 8) and 'a long long (time) ago' (lines 9–10). Perhaps James would have continued by suggesting that dog-killing is humane, but his argument/explanation is stopped by Sky, whose disagreement displays classic argument features (in-breath to indicate the beginning of a turn, turn incursion, opening a turn with emphasis and rising intonation, repetition; see Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990).

Once he has taken the floor, Sky counters James' position by stating 'I love dogs too, but (that) doesn't mean I have to eat them' (lines 12–14). This statement suggests that (1) Sky thinks that James is claiming to both love dogs, and to enjoy eating them, that (2) Sky wants to challenge this presumed position and possibly that (3) James is trying to reject Sky's claim to liking dogs. In doing this, Sky interestingly invokes 'dogs' membership in both the categories of 'pets' and of 'edible animals', implying that he loves them as pets, but does not consider them a legitimate member of an 'edible animal' category. It is also worth noting here that, in challenging James, Sky is clearly demonstrating that he sees James' previous turn as worthy of argument; in contrast to the previous excerpts, this discussion is being oriented to as a serious one.

James does not respond in the following transition relevant place (line 15), so Sky pursues a response by asking 'right?' (line 16). Another pause follows this (0.5 seconds, line 17), before James begins to contrast Sky's position with his own ('in your case yeah, but in my case ...', lines 20–22). This is unusual in that their positions (i.e. not approving of eating dog) are the same. This too is a typical feature of conflict talk, in that an oppositional stance is often taken, regardless of what has actually been said previously (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990).

Sky tries to regain the floor (line 23), but James doesn't allow him. Instead, James begins another extended turn by telling a short story about 'the one experience' (lines 27–29) he has of eating dog. James explains that he was 'six years old' (line 30), and

that his grandparents essentially tricked him into eating dog soup, by pretending it was not dog, but bear ('my grandfather and grandma said "hey James, that is not dog soup, it's only bear soup"', lines 31–34).[6] Throughout his anecdote, James emphasises his youth ('I was very young', line 35) and implies his naivety ('I think, "wow, it's a good chance to have bear soup"', lines 50–51). This continues throughout the 14 omitted lines.

James suggests that it took him some time to realise that he had been tricked by his grandparents, and in doing so, again emphasises the distance between the event and his current position ('as time goes by', line 52). James concludes by stating that, when he 'knew that is dog soup, after that I hate to have dog soup' (lines 33–35).

The amount of interactional work that James puts in to justifying his childhood action is evidence that he is cognisant of the negative view many have towards eating dog. However, it is interesting that James goes to the trouble to tell this story at all; if he wanted to be perceived as someone who hates to eat dog, he could have simply denied ever eating dog, in any form. It seems apparent that this anecdote serves two purposes: (1) to show to Sky that, although James is part of a Korean culture in which some members do engage in dog-eating practices, he only did so when tricked into it, and has been opposed to the idea ever since, and (2) to emphasise that his grandparents, father and elder brother may eat dog, but that he is different from these older Koreans. This implies that there are different attitudes towards eating dogs across generations, and may also invoke a subcategory collection of 'Old Koreans'/'Young Koreans', with eating dogs being a practice bound to the former category. In invoking this, James can be seen to contest the activity of eating dogs as being bound to the category of '(all) Koreans'.

So, while James does not deny that some Koreans have/do engage in dog-eating, his anecdote and explanation display that the practice is not as simple as Sky might have implied. James clearly distances himself from the action in question, and also distances himself from those who do willingly engage in that action. In doing this, James demonstrates, and makes relevant, the complexity of the national cultural practice under discussion, and also refutes the simplicity of the assumption Sky made about it being 'okay to eat a dog in Korea'.

Discussion

This study has adopted ethnomethodological and conversation analytic principles to investigate intercultural communication. Our findings showed how encounters among unacquainted people in chat rooms presented opportunities for interactants to reveal their assumptions of cultural practices. By uncovering how unacquainted interactants in chat rooms discuss their understanding of cultural practices, we have added to the existing intercultural literature. While studies like Nishizaka (1999) – where the analytic focus was on the social organisation of intercultural communication – and Mori (2003) – where her research examined how cultural identities can be made varyingly relevant or irrelevant over the course of the interaction – provide much of what is currently known with regard to how culture is used as a resource for organising social interaction, we have shed further light on the role of culture in interaction by demonstrating how questions and assumptions regarding national cultural practices can be deployed, accepted, refuted and debated in multi-party interaction.

In excerpt 1, for example, the interactants revealed their assumptions of Korean and Chinese food-eating practices in their attempts at getting acquainted. What is particularly unique and interesting in our findings is that the interactants draw on their assumptions of China as a way of discussing the food-eating practices of Korea. This is an area of research – that is, using a 'third' culture to mediate cultural similarities and differences – that is presently underexplored in the intercultural communication literature. We believe future research should examine the issue of using a third culture as a mediating device in greater detail as the discussion of cultures among interactants can also include those that no one is a member of. For instance, Sky draws upon his assumption that Chinese people eat dogs, in broaching a potentially face-threatening topic (Brown & Levinson, 1987), whereas June refers to the story that Chinese people eat everything, in responding to Sky's provocative question. Sky's assumption that China and Korea may share similar food-eating practices presents the other interactants, in turn, with opportunities to accept or refute this cultural comparison. In other words, China becomes a topically relevant issue in the discussion of what Koreans eat and do not eat. We saw that June refutes the cultural comparison through the telling of a story, in which he suggests that Chinese people eat anything except legs of chairs. Though the upshot of the story is that Koreans and Chinese are different, June uses China as a mediating device to discuss the topic of Korean food-eating practices: 'in Korea, distinction is preferred from China.'

Furthermore, our findings showed the discursive work involved in the negotiation of stereotypes. While a stereotype – in part – reduces a country to a single characteristic, generalisations of country and culture are expandable by the interactants that are treated as members of the country and culture in question. For instance, Sky displays his assumption about aspects of Korean culture, namely that Koreans eat dogs. Whether this assumption is based on real-life encounters or derived from various hearsay sources, the stereotype that Koreans eat dogs simplifies the eating practices of an entire country. More importantly, the assumption that Koreans eat dogs obliges James to address whether or not he falls within the stereotypical category of dog-eater. In other words, stereotypes are negotiable and expandable. James subsequently addresses this assumption when he describes the one time he did in fact eat dog (excerpt 3). James engages in a lengthy narrative in order to make it clear that although he has eaten a dog before, he did so without knowing. James could have easily denied eating dog, but he makes the effort to show that, while dog-eating does occur in Korea, not everybody participates in this practice. James' extended response not only demonstrates his disapproval with the practice, but it also serves to inform Sky of the complexities related to eating dogs in Korea. The observation that cultural assumptions are negotiable is similar to that outlined in Fukuda's (2006) research, in which a Chinese student contests and refutes assumptions made about China by her Japanese hosts.

Despite James' attempt to complexify the issue of eating dogs, we can see that cultural assumptions are at times treated as simple, taken-for-granted facts. This is evident when cultural assumptions are not contested, but rather used as resources to achieve interactional and rhetorical goals. For example, the notion that it is normal to eat dog in China is not contested by any of the interactants, but is used as a rhetorical device to ask whether dog-eating occurs in Korea. Since the eating of certain animals is a potentially delicate topic, it is possible that Sky is aware of the controversy and offence he will cause by asking his co-interactants whether they eat

dogs. It could be said that Sky uses his assumption of Chinese food-eating practices to initiate a potentially sensitive topic. In other words, Sky is able to broach the issue of eating dogs by establishing that this food-eating practice occurs elsewhere. Similarly, June's assumption that the Chinese eat anything is taken for granted, and is also used as a rhetorical device to make the distinction between Koreans and Chinese. In both cases, the interactants do not question the veracity of their assumptions regarding Chinese cultural practices (cf. James' extended response), but rather use them to take part in banter. While Korean food-eating practices were treated as complex and multifaceted, the same could not be said for Chinese food-eating practices. This observation is particularly noteworthy as it shows that various cultural practices can be treated as both complex and simple in a single interactional sequence. One cultural assumption can be used to contest another, for example. Again, we believe the phenomenon of using one culture to discuss another is a fertile area for future research.

Our observations demonstrate that talk-in-interaction is the site for deploying and dealing with cultural assumptions, and this study has uncovered some of the ways in which this is done. Though our findings expand current understanding of intercultural communication in a number of ways – namely, by examining a setting where the interactants are neither 'foreigner' nor 'native', and showing how the interactants of this setting use cultural assumptions to achieve an understanding of each other – we suggest that future research can be developed in a number of directions. The data presented here are just a few examples, all taken from the same interaction. In order to better understand intercultural communication, we propose that the literature expand its empirical database to include other forms of intercultural interaction, such as cross-regional, intra-regional and/or cross-subcultural interactions,[7] and explores other contexts, like multinational university settings, as well as new and emerging settings, such as the Internet and mobile telephone communication. One way forward in investigating new and emerging settings is to use MCA or other micro-analytic methods to investigate the interactional character of cultural assumptions. Such research would shed further light, as our study has done here, on how aspect of culture, cultural practices and identities are discursively deployed and negotiated for interactional and rhetorical purposes.

Notes

1. Please see articles and books referenced for more detailed descriptions of ethnomethodology, its principles and approach to social research. Put briefly, ethnomethodological research focuses on the methods and procedures undertaken by social members in the local management and accomplishment of social understanding. Two of its main research tools are conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA). CA is the study of social action as manifest through talk (and other conduct). Its research focus is on the sequential organisation and order of social interaction. MCA's interest is in the presumed common-sense knowledge of social structures. MCA's research focus is the study of the categories members use in organising and understanding their social world.

CA and MCA are very much mutually supportive methodologies and one is invariably used in order to inform the other.

2. Translated from Japanese ('*ja nihon no eega wa mita koto arimasu ka*?'), in which there was no (and seldom is) use of a personal pronoun.
3. A reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper suggested that the inclusion of China may be evidence of an invocation of a multinational membership category 'Asian countries', with the in-built implication that Asian countries share category-bound attributes and practices. It is felt that there is insufficient evidence to support this in our data, but future research into notions of multinational categories and subsequent category-bound practices may be warranted.
4. This would appear to be June's interpretation/version of an idiom which expresses the belief that in China, many 'unusual' items are considered edible: 'the Chinese will eat anything with four legs that is not a chair, and anything that flies that is not an airplane'.
5. Within Korean society, it is often argued by those who are in favour of eating dog meat that it provides strength and virility.
6. It may be worth noting that James' claim of having 'bear soup' may be erroneous, and be due to a mistranslation from Korean. 'Beef soup' in Korean is known as 'gomtang'. 'Tang' translates into English as 'soup' and, while 'gom' on its own would translate as 'bear', in this case it refers to the extensive boiling process under which the soup is prepared.
7. Egbert (2004) looks at regional and linguistic category membership in interaction, and labels this as 'intercultural'. To our knowledge, all other research on interculturality has looked exclusively at national cultural identities and differences.

Notes on contributors

Adam Brandt is a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University. His research approach is micro-analytic in nature, and informed by conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis. He is interested in researching social interaction in various contexts, including those which pertain to international interaction and second language use. His doctoral thesis is concerned with the use of English as a lingua franca in online, voice-based chat rooms.

Christopher Jenks is an Assistant Professor of English at City University of Hong Kong. Christopher's main research approach is microanalysis (e.g., conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics). His research deals primarily with computer-mediated communication, intercultural communication, and English as a lingua franca. Other research expertise includes epistemological and methodological issues in applied linguistic research. He reviews for a number of top international journals, including *Applied Linguistics*, and is an editorial board member for *Classroom Discourse*. His co-edited book, *Conceptualising Learning in Applied Linguistics*, was published in 2010 by Palgrave Macmillan.

References

Bjorge, A.K. (2007). Power distance in English lingua franca email communication. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *17*(1), 60–80.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carbaugh, D. (2007). Cultural discourse analysis: Communication practices and intercultural encounters. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *36*(3), 167–182.

Chiang, S.Y. (2009). Mutual understanding as a procedural achievement in intercultural interaction. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *6*(3), 367–394.

Egbert, M. (2004). Other-initiated repair and membership categorization – some conversational events that trigger linguistic and regional membership categorization. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *36*, 1467–1498.

Fukuda, C. (2006). Resistance against being formulated as cultural other: The case of a Chinese student in Japan. *Pragmatics*, *16*(4), 429–456.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology.* Cornwall: Polity.

Goodwin, C., & Goodwin, M.H. (1990). Interstitial argument. In A. Grimshaw (Ed.), *Conflict talk* (pp. 85–117). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goodwin, C., & Heritage, J. (1990). Conversation analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 19,* 283–307.

Heritage, J. (1984). A change-of-state token and aspects of its sequential placement. In M.J. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 299–345). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hester, S., & Eglin, P. (1997). *Culture in action: Studies in membership categorization analysis.* Washington, DC: University Press of America.

Jenks, C.J. (2009). Getting acquainted in Skypecasts: Aspects of social organization in online chat rooms. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 19*(1), 26–46.

Maynard, D.W., & Zimmerman, D.H. (1984). Topical talk, ritual and the social organization of relationship. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 47,* 301–316.

Mori, J. (2003). The construction of interculturality: A study of initial encounters between Japanese and American students. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 36*(2), 143–184.

Neuliep, J.W. (2006). Editorial welcome. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 35*(1), 1–2.

Nishizaka, A. (1995). The interactive constitution of interculturality: How to be a Japanese with words. *Human Studies, 18,* 301–326.

Nishizaka, A. (1999). Doing interpreting within interaction: The interactive accomplishment of a "henna gaijin" or "strange foreigner". *Human Studies, 22,* 235–251.

Roberts, F., & Robinson, J.D. (2004). Interobserver agreement on first-stage conversation analytic transcription. *Human Communication Research, 30*(3), 376–410.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language, 50*(4), 696–735.

Schegloff, E. (1982). Discourse as an interactional achievement: Some uses of "uh huh" and other things that come between sentences. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk* (pp. 71–93). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Schegloff, E.A. (2007). *Sequence organisation in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schiffrin, D. (1988). *Discourse markers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, D. (1987). Repetition in conversation: Toward a poetics of talk. *Language, 63*(3), 574–605.

Appendix 1. Transcription conventions

(modified from Atkinson & Heritage, 1984)

[[]]	Simultaneous utterances – (beginning [[) and (end]])
[]	Overlapping utterances – (beginning [) and (end])
=	Contiguous utterances, or continuation of the same turn by the same speaker even though the turn is separated in the transcript
(0.4)	Represent the tenths of a second between utterances
(.)	Represents a micro-pause (one-tenth of a second or less)
:	Sound extension of a word (more colons demonstrate longer stretches)
.	Fall in tone (not necessarily the end of a sentence)
,	Continuing intonation (not necessarily between clauses)
-	An abrupt stop in articulation
?	Rising inflection (not necessarily a question)
__	Underline words indicate emphasis
↑ ?	Rising or falling intonation
° °	Surrounds talk that is quieter
Hhh	Audible aspirations

(hh)   Laughter within a word
> <   Surrounds talk that is spoken faster
< >   Surrounds talk that is spoken slower
(())   Analyst's notes
()   Approximations of what is heard
$ $ Surrounds 'smile' voice
ˆ ˆ   Surrounds 'trill' voice